

The Canoeist and the Swimming Pool

Guidance to Authorities and Pool Managers

Swimming pools provide a superb resource for introducing people to Paddlesport and provide opportunities for paddlers to develop their skills and experience in a comfortable, safe, and easily managed environment, unaffected by seasonal weather conditions.

Paddlesport, by its very nature, is diverse. The swimming pool environment is ideally suited to enabling enthusiasts of all ages and persuasions to benefit from easy access to water and making the most of their leisure time, particularly throughout the winter months.

Pool sessions can maximise opportunities for experiencing our sport's diversity, overcoming fears of capsizing, learning to paddle, developing water confidence, improving boat handling skills, raising awareness of general safety procedures and also specific rescue practice, all in a safe and controlled environment.

Equally important to paddlers and to the sport of canoeing are the opportunities that swimming pool sessions provide for groups of paddlers to come together within a social and community context, benefiting from sound experiences, challenge and competition. Here particularly, swimming pools have provided an incalculable boost to the development of Canoe Polo. Polo is an important team game; it is ever growing in popularity and in its international standing, at which GB paddlers excel with many European and World honours including recent Men's Gold and Women's Silver in the Polo World Championships.

The British Canoe Union, Paddlesport, and Swimming Pools in Partnership

The BCU recognises that Swimming Pools are expensive facilities to provide and that they are often operated under subsidies that are themselves cash limited. In this respect canoeists should be aware that per hour charges can translate into high individual charges where the density of individuals using the pool is low and therefore canoeists ought not to expect any better or worse treatment on charging than any other bona fide user. However, continued access to swimming pools to maintain such opportunities is clearly very important to the sport of canoeing and as such the BCU is committed to developing and promoting the use of swimming pools by paddlers and to ensuring that all pool activity can take place in a cost effective and safe way.

...Concerned by:

.... the costs associated with swimming pool provision and the subsequent knock-on effects of this in respect of the hiring of pools and the attendant danger of denying paddlers and local communities from benefiting from pool access;

..... the current attitude to litigation and the need for swimming pools and authorities / organisations to ensure they meet their 'duty of care';

.....the fact that the current response to this is based on the increased demand for pool employed supervision only to cater for the safety needs of a 'specialist' pool user group.

The British Canoe Union strongly promotes to all authorities and organisations providing swimming pool facilities the opportunities available to them of partnership with the BCU, and its network of affiliated clubs to ensure continued, safe, and sustainable access to Swimming Pools.



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Recognised by the UK and Home Nation Sports Councils as the Governing Body of the Sport of Canoeing and recognised also by the Health and Safety Executive and the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority, the BCU's Coaching Service provides training and qualifications for paddlers and coaches in leadership, group management, safety and rescue.

The BCU provides five levels of Coaching Award with additional endorsements for first aid, lifesaving, and the use of swimming pools. It is the BCU's considered opinion that paddlers trained and coached within its own scheme, more than adequately provide for the safe participation of individuals in canoeing activities taking place in a swimming pool environment.

It is recognised by the Health and Safety Executive in its publication 'Managing Health and Safety in Swimming Pools' (HSG 179 ISBN 978-0-7176-2686-1) that *"Lifeguards require specialised skills or additional knowledge to supervise canoeing and subaqua adequately. Organisations that can advise are listed in appendix 7"*. (The BCU is listed in Appendix 7.)

Realising that such 'specialist' knowledge is not necessarily available to most pool managers and pool attendants, the BCU recommends that the pool manager can take two options:

1. Provide adequate supervision by either training lifeguards to obtain the necessary skills or by employing lifeguards who already have those skills
2. Allow the hirer to provide the necessary cover

The specialist skills necessary are:

1. **When running a club session with coaching for club members, the recommended qualification is BCU Coach Level 1 or higher**
2. **When running a public session the recommended qualification is BCU (UKCC) Level 1 Coach or higher (as per the BCU Terms of Reference)**
3. **When running Polo activity, the recommended qualification would be the holding of a Polo Coaching award or Polo referee status**

The options outlined above provide staff competent to manage the safety of the participants, lifeguarding responsibilities, and also take responsibility for the session activities and learning. Where lifeguarding responsibilities only are required, the minimum qualification is Pool Lifeguard plus BCU Canoe Safety Test or a BCU Coaching Qualification. This could be provided by one individual, or through shared responsibility.

Due consideration to these points by authorities, organizations and pool managers in determining their 'duty of care' provision in relation to 'specialist' user groups could provide ideal opportunities to enter into 'partnership' with the BCU via individual Clubs and Coaches. Such action would ensure that 'duty of care' requirements are fully covered and to continue to provide cost effective access to members of the community to what in most cases is a community facility.

HSE Guidelines (Managing health and safety in swimming pools, HSE 2007, page 114) provide guidance on the responsibilities of the pool operator for lifeguard provision when the pool is hired to other people. Appendix 5 provides a checklist of points for inclusions in contracts:

- (a) Information on numbers participating and their swimming skills
- (b) Name of the hirer's representative(s) who will be in charge of the group

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- (c) Numbers and skills/qualifications of lifeguards to be present during the session; and whether these will be provided by the hirer or by the pool operator
- (d) Hirer to be given copies of normal and emergency operating procedures, and to sign to the effect that these have been read and understood
- (e) Specific agreement on the respective responsibilities of the pool operator and the hirer for action in any emergency. A distinction to be drawn between:
 - (i) emergencies arising from the activities of the group using the pool
 - (ii) other emergencies (structural or power failures, etc)

Responsibility for the latter will remain with the pool operator who will therefore need to have competent staff in attendance during the hire session

- (f) Any rules of behaviour to be enforced during the session
- (g) Any advice on safety to be given to participants, e.g. on avoiding alcohol and food immediately before swimming

The HSE guidelines also provide further direction for pool operators on factors to consider when deciding whether constant poolside supervision is necessary (page 65-66).

The BCU recommend that when being approached by clubs seeking access to time slots within pool programmes, managers should expect/seek the following negotiation, discussion and agreements with respective club leaders:

- Direct contact between yourself and a recognised club official creating an opportunity for both parties to consider their concerns, i.e. pool damage, pollution and safety provision
- Pool / facility manager and organiser should determine if the normal safety standards of the pool could be provided by the canoe club

Where this is the case the following need also to be considered and put in place:

- The establishment of clear and effective working relationships between yourselves (liaising parties). Ensuring knowledge of and direct involvement in safety issues related to the pools emergency plan, risk assessment and contact points. Occasional meetings to check on how the partnership is operating, etc
- Jointly, the pool/facility manager and club representative should ensure that the agreed safe operating procedures can be enacted in the event of an emergency such as a drowning or other serious accident. This should include raising the alarm, summoning the emergency services and the use of specialised equipment on hand to provide life support
- Pool / facility managers should, from time to time, make provision to test that the club maintains the safety standards agreed

Should it not be felt that the pool's normal safety standards can be provided by the canoe club it may be necessary for a member of pool staff to be on hand should an emergency occur to ensure the site-specific procedure is enacted. This person need not be a lifeguard for the canoe session but simply a member of staff on hand to carry out the essential elements of an emergency procedure agreed and recorded in the written procedures for the pool.

Additionally the following negotiation, discussion and agreements should be considered:

- Provision by the club official of the names and qualifications of intended specialist safety personnel
- Confirmation that the club is an affiliated BCU Club or BCU Approved Centre
- Arrangements for boats and boat storage
- Agree a code of conduct and terms of operation for pool usage

Building a partnership with a club or centre and being able to create cost effective access to a pool can have further 'pay back' for the club manager and your pool's local community. Most clubs are more than willing to support the community activities of swimming pools and could be approached to support a pool paddling session as part of your community programme.

Pool Managers - Assuring yourself of actual requirements / gaining further reference as to a clubs suitability as a user of your pool

Having had contact with club officials to discuss their potential use of your pool you may well have additional concerns you wish to raise or you may wish to reference the status of the club and of the qualifications of a coach's personal award as a supervisor. In such instances please contact:

BCU UK Director of Coaching at the British Canoe Union, 18 Market Place, Bingham, Nottinghamshire NG13 8AP or e-mail on coaching@bcu.org.uk

The BCU have a network of Coaching Development officers, Paddlesport Development Officers and Regional Coaching Organisers available to them. Any one of which can be made available to visit any proposals or arrangements you may be considering.

We would recommend also that facility managers and user groups move towards preparing a joint statement on the role of a given facility in the development of Paddlesports. This should incorporate what actually happens and is actually planned. It need not be long, but could simply set out that the pool aims to provide an indoor venue for introducing beginners to canoeing and for winter training. Any such statement could be developed for those facilities that want to be more directly involved with canoeing as an activity.

Additional Details:

Coach:Paddler Ratio

In public sessions the recommended ratio of coaches to paddlers is 1:8 though a qualified BCU Coach may operate with more dependent upon their judgement and experience. In Canoe Polo minimum on the water numbers may be 10 while the maximum may be 16.

Recommended numbers of canoes and/or kayaks

The number of canoes/kayaks allowed in a pool at any one time will depend on the size of the pool and the activity. While one-to-one coaching in the pool may require the coach / trainer to be in the water free swimmers are not allowed in the water at the same time unless the pool is partitioned. Except for Canoe Polo, it is not essential to wear buoyancy aids or helmets.

Although Canoe Polo involves physical contact and controlled aggression, given the nature of the protective equipment worn - complete upper body protection in the form of a dense all-round buoyancy aid, helmet and face guard - the likelihood of injury to a participant is minimal.

How to prevent damage to pools – some good practice

There are two potential sources of damage to pools from the use of canoes:

1. Boats with pointed ends striking the sides of the pool
2. Paddles hitting the pool sides / bottom

It is important that coaches and paddlers using pools for canoeing purposes are aware of the damage that canoes can cause and the significant knock on effect that damage caused by canoes and canoeists can have on pool close down time.

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Damage to tiles for example is not just about replacing tiles - broken or damaged tiles can be potentially harmful to other pool users, tiles can be expensive to replace and require pools to be drained and, if nothing else, damaged tiles are unsightly and off-putting to other pool users, possibly having an effect on user perception and continued use.

Clubs using pools should consider these issues with at least equal priority to general safety matters as addressing the potential for damage within your user strategy and responsibilities will set priorities and guidelines that are both preventative and reflective to minimise damage and to establish best practice review should problems occur.

Ideally, clubs and organisers regularly using the same pool should endeavour to have a 'for pool use only' fleet of canoes and paddles that do not move off site. These could clearly be purchased specifically for use in the pool and designed and maintained exclusively for indoor use.

Where there is any possibility of the ends of canoes causing damage, they should be protected with etha-foam or other suitably dense material, secured with adhesive tape. Where Canoe Polo is played, the ends of the polo kayaks must be protected as per the BCU Canoe Polo rules.

Whilst any type of canoe, used properly, may be used in a pool, advance trainer or BATs and any modern short play boat are the most suitable. Where there is paddling in sharp-ended boats (e.g. pool slalom or slalom training) it is preferable to set the gates in such a way that the boats will not strike the sides of the pool. Paddles with wooden, plastic, or composite blades only, without metal tips, should be used.

Avoiding pollution

The only other source of damage is through pollution from river / seawater, dirt, leaves, and crumbs of polystyrene buoyancy foam, etc.

Where canoes are used outside of the pool environment and then returned to the pool on a rotational or occasional basis it is important that clubs / organisers give priority to ensuring that all canoes and equipment are cleaned prior to pool use. Pre-cleansing should ensure that all river / sea contamination is removed. Any dirt should be hosed off the canoes prior to use with a mild disinfectant in a suitable area for this purpose identified with the pool manager.

Buoyancy for kayaks should comprise of etha-foam or air bags rather than polystyrene.

Swimming ability

When setting up canoeing sessions, the ideal scenario is that every participant would be able to swim 25m, but this is not always the case. Canoeing is an ideal activity to raise water confidence for non-swimmers and can be managed safely by BCU Coaches. It is important that coaches are aware of any non-swimmers in the session, and put in place the necessary risk management strategies, this may include the use of buoyancy aids.

Equipment

It is important to ensure that all equipment used is appropriately sized. This is especially true for young people, and with the use of buoyancy aids.

Summary of BCU awards relevant to Specialist Pool Supervision

In 2007, the BCU introduced several new coaching awards, aligned with the UKCC, it is therefore important to recognise that coaches may hold qualifications from the either scheme.

BCU UKCC Level 1 Certificate in Coaching Paddlesport

A BCU UKCC Level 1 Coach may assist more qualified coaches, coaching a group of paddlers in sheltered or very sheltered water environments (including swimming pools). With additional training, they may be deployed independently under the management structure of a club or centre.

BCU Level 1 Coach Award

The BCU Level 1 Kayak or Canoe Coach Award is aimed at coaches and youth leaders who wish to introduce others to canoeing at a 'taster' level only, using small, sheltered, and simple-water sites. It is not a suitable level of qualification for canoeing leaders of clubs or groups for whom the pastime is a main activity. For staff employed at Centres, it is suitable only for 'first session' introductory purposes, and only when under the general supervision of a higher award holder. Candidates must hold or be competent to the level of the relevant BCU 2 Star test. Level 1 Kayak Coaches are regarded as competent to operate closed cockpit kayaks, open cockpit kayaks, and open canoes within the terms of reference stated. However, Level 1 Canoe Coaches **can only** operate with canoes within the terms of reference stated. The status is intended only as a very basic coaching award, but the holder should be able to transmit a basic understanding to all their charges to enable the purpose of the session to be achieved. It must always be borne in mind that the sphere of operation of the Level 1 Award is restricted, and the overriding priority is **SAFETY WITH ENJOYMENT**. It is relevant for use throughout the year, with the provisos listed.

BCU UKCC Level 2 Certificate in Coaching Paddlesport

A BCU UKCC Level 2 Coach may coach, and be in sole charge of, a group of paddlers in sheltered or very sheltered water environments (including swimming pools).

BCU Level 2 Coach Award

To provide a nationally recognised qualification for those wishing to introduce others to canoeing on simple waters only (or equivalent very sheltered coastal areas) in 'general purpose' kayaks designed for use on white water, or in open cockpit canoes or kayaks. It is an indication of a level of competence for introducing groups (normally about 8) to the standard of the BCU 2 Star test. It is implicit that training be undertaken with students properly equipped to normal safety requirements. Sheltered water is a canal, small lake, sheltered area of larger lake, holiday beach close inshore on a calm day, or quiet river, not involving the shooting of, or playing on weirs or grade one / two rapids.

BCU Polo Level 1 Competition Coach Award

The basic qualification for coaching Canoe Polo is the Level 1 Competition Coach Award. The underlying aim of the award is to ensure that canoe polo is supervised in an enjoyable, constructive and, above all, safe manner. The syllabus includes a module that addresses the issue of general safety in canoe polo and, specifically, pool safety issues.

BCU Polo Referee

The basic qualification for Canoe Polo referees is the Grade 4 Award. The training stresses the responsibility of the referee for the safety and general well-being of players, the syllabus including a module that addresses the issue of safety in Canoe Polo and, specifically, Pool Safety issues.

For further details please contact:

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E-mail coaching@bcu.org.uk